

if I can truthfully say: "I did what I could. I sought her and found her not, called her and she did not reply."<sup>3</sup> The same note is struck in some of St Teresa's exhortations, where she tells her daughters to dispose themselves for infused prayer, as far as it is in their power, and not to be disconsolate if they do not get it. 'If contemplation and mental and vocal prayer and tending the sick and serving in the house and working at even the lowliest tasks are of service to the Guest who comes to stay with us and to eat and take his recreation with us, what should it matter to us if we do one of these things rather than another? I do not mean that it is for us to say what we shall do, but that we must do our best in everything, for the choice is not ours but the Lord's. If after many years he is pleased to give each of us her office, it will be a curious kind of humility for you to wish to choose; . . . Be sure that, if you do what lies in your power and prepare yourself for high contemplation, with the perfection aforementioned, then, if he does not grant it you . . . it will be because he has laid up this joy for you so as to give it you in heaven.'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Richard of St Victor: *De Trinitate*. P.L. 196, col. 916

<sup>4</sup> St Teresa: *Way of Perfection*, ch. 17 (*Complete Works*, ed. E. Allison Peers, 1946, ii, 71).



## THE RE-FORMATION OF THE SOUL

BY

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NE of the most fundamental ideas in the understanding of the ascent of the Christian towards God is that of transformation into Christ. But it is a difficult idea to grasp. So easily transformation—the taking on of a new form—slips into an identification which would be a type of pantheism. Otherwise it remains as a mere simile, suggesting that the lover of Christ becomes *like* Christ, simply because he performs the same sort of actions.

Another way of stating the same difficulty is to be found in the discussion concerning the nature of the unity of the Mystical Body. What sort of unity characterises the one Body of Christ on Earth? A formal unity? That would identify all the members with the head and they would lose their own personalities. Or is it simply a final unity arising from the fact that all are aiming at the same

final point of beatitude? Such a union would differ in little or nothing from the union of human society. But in fact every Christian by grace is in some way transformed into Christ, and all Christians take on the life of Christ and carry it into the ordinary life of today. The supernatural life is the life of the one, the triune God so that the new form given by grace does in fact raise the whole of the natural man on to a new plane.

It is not surprising therefore to discover that St Paul who set forth the doctrine of the mystical body so constantly and so clearly, should also be concerned with this transformation of the individual into Christ. 'My dear children', he says in words quoted by Walter Hilton, 'which I bear as a woman beareth her child, until Christ be again shapen in you.'<sup>1</sup> And almost any page of the epistles will reveal some aspect of this re-shaping or re-forming of the soul according to the new image of Christ. Even the 'body of our lowness' will be re-formed by Christ so that it is configured to the 'clarity' of his own glorious body (Phil. 3, 21). Thus the mystical body can be seen as really in the person of an individual Christian as in the entire 'household of the faith'; for the same principle whereby the soul is wholly in the whole body and wholly in every individual part may be applied here where the Christian fully reformed into Christ becomes 'in mystery' the whole Christ, he lives the life of Christ and contains the whole Church in himself. The union of the mystical body is nothing other than the union of the whole man in Christ with God.

But in order to attain this perfect transformation, which is only reached at the summit of the ladder or scale of perfection, it is necessary to unfold gradually the true image of Christ in the soul. At first there is another kind of image, an evil shadow cast on the soul by sin and the habits of sin. The image of the Blessed Trinity has been overlaid or ousted by the image of sin.

When Adam sinned, choosing love and delight in himself and in creatures, he lost all his worship and his dignity (and thou also in him), and fell from that blessed trinity into a foul, dark, wretched trinity: that is into forgetting of God and unknowing of Him, and into a beastly liking of himself. (*The Scale*, i, 43, p. 78.)

Indeed when man turns from God he does in fact attempt to establish the centre of the universe in himself; and if we examine his state closely we find that without the blessed Trinity to look

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 4, 19. Hilton's *Scale* is primarily concerned with the re-forming of the soul into the image of Christ. Cf. i, 92, p. 171 *et passim*.

towards and without the mirror of the Word made flesh into which he may seek his true likeness, man begins to make himself into a trinity. He tries to analyse and to know himself in such a way as to find true satisfaction in that knowledge. He cares not for other knowledge except that it be in some way reflected in himself, in his own soul. The powerful, practical sinner, not given to introspection, rests unwittingly in the apprehension of his own prowess and practicality—he is easily given to boasting. The more sensitive man turns into himself and measures all his experience, his reading, his conversation against himself as the Father might measure the world against the Word, his Son, in whom all things are moulded. In short, the 'word' of the sinner is in fact the image of his own sinful soul, not pouring itself out in goodness as the Word of God, but shrivelling up and narrowing in pride.

Soothly thus thou shalt find but a dark image and a painful of thine own soul, which hath neither light of knowing nor feeling of love nor liking. This image if thou behold it wittily, is all unbelapped with black stinking clothes of sin; as pride, envy, ire, accidie, covetousness, gluttony and lechery. This is not the image of Jesus; but it is an image of sin. (i, 52.)

Similarly, the will of the sinner instead of being occupied with goodness of God becomes preoccupied with his own good, in such a way that he begins to breathe forth himself. And as before the objective practical man exhibits himself more consciously, boasting of his own achievement and exploding with temper when his pride has been attacked. The introspective and sensitive man is more subtle in his 'self-spiration'; he breathes forth himself in secretly despising most other men and envying those who show signs of being successful in their lives. Living outwardly a good and virtuous life this 'self-generator' and 'self-breather' may still be harbouring pride in the centre of his person, and thus will 'corrupt all the flowers of the garden of thy soul, show they never so fair outwardly in the sight of men'.<sup>2</sup>

To describe this inner trinity of sin in terms of an image or a shadow should not therefore beget a schizophrenic attitude common among certain people who refuse to take responsibility for their state, who always shirk the shame of identifying themselves with their personal evil and push it all off on to their 'shadows'. It is difficult for such people to know that they have an 'ego' at all, so divided up do they become by their dragons and their shadows,

<sup>2</sup> i, 55, p. 104. Cf. the following chapter where Hilton discloses the nature and evil of pride.

their parents and their childhood long passed. Hilton does not press this simile to that extent but uses at the same time the even more penetrating one, which we have seen in *The Cloud* and in Mother Julian, of the naught. The image of sin in us is the naught, the nothingness, the absence of good, which is opposed to the goodness and reality of God.

Thou beginnest to think, unto what thing this image should be like. . . . I tell thee that it is like no bodily thing. . . . Soothly it is naught, and that mayest thou find if thou wilt assay as I have said to thee. Draw into thyself thy thought from all bodily things, and then shalt thou find right naught wherein thy soul may rest. This naught is naught else but darkness of conscience, a lacking of love and light; as sin is naught but a wanting of God. (i, 53, p. 99.)

This 'ground of sin' must therefore be identified with ourselves as separated from God. My mind lacks God and my will too because they have been turned from him—this is the darkness of which St John speaks at the beginning of his gospel, the darkness of sinful nature with which I must identify myself.

None the less we can picture it as though a mirror which was reflecting the glory of God shining all about was suddenly filled by my own selfish presence, as I stood right over it. It is only when I myself begin to shine in that glory that I can begin to see it once again in the mirror, reflecting me still but reflecting me transformed into the Son of God. For this reason we have to look *beneath* or *through* this dark image of self—this naught which 'is a false misruled love unto thy self' (i 55, p. 102)—in order to find the image of Jesus, who already by the Incarnation has sanctified my nature and is ready to sanctify *me*, to re-discover in me the image of God to which I was created in the first place. He is in this way hidden in our hearts and we have to delve deep, penetrating this evil veil of self ('bear down and go through it', 'burst through it'—i 54, p. 101).

For within this naught is Jesus hid in his joy, whom thou mayest not find by thy seeking unless thou pass the darkness of this i, 54, p. 101).

There is no short cut or by-pass which will skirt one's evil self and lead to Christ. It is easy to fall into the habit of trying to escape one's evil habits and weaknesses, to annul them in some way, bottling them up so that they may not function. When we speak in this context of the new creation effected by grace it should not imply that a man ceases to be what he had been, annihilated or at least suppressed, and is made once again without his previous

defects. This is a question of re-forming a sinful man, transforming him as he is into something new, the man himself is transformed.

The transformation is therefore a gradual process. Sins and weaknesses still remain; indeed the sinfulness of a man will often urge him on, increasing his thirst for our Lord until such time. The more of Jesus he discovers in his soul the more desire he has to find Jesus wholly and the more he despises the naught of his own sinfulness still remaining. In this way we see how the stubbornness of St Teresa of Lisieux is gradually changed into the heroic fortitude of Christ accepting with determination the will of the Father; the affectionate nature of St Mary Magdalen poured out upon so many men in so selfish a manner becomes the single love of Jesus. It would be foolish to expect to be rid of the things that have become part of one's own individuality; the tendency to sin in one particular way—by anger in an irate temperament, by sloth in a lazy, etc.—will remain, but the tendency itself becomes an occasion of grace.

#### Temptations

are no reproving nor any forsaking, but assaying for their betterment, either for cleansing of their sins before done, or for great increasing of their meed and disposing to much grace, if they will suffer awhile and stand fast. (i, 38, p. 66.)

For one thing such afflictions increase humility in the sinner who recognises his past sins beating back upon him like waves on an ebb tide, and he has to acknowledge his own incapacity to resist any one of them without the grace of God, which is in fact the true Christ within him. At the same time he has no fear because his faith and trust in the power and love of God increases as the temptations drive him more firmly within the protecting hands of the Lord. The temptations at first are the grosser sins, such as 'lechery and gluttony'—Hilton calls them 'open sins'. But as the grace of God triumphs over these they become more subtle and more dangerous—'the ghostly sins' such as disbelief, blasphemy, despair or depression.

loathing of their life, or bitterness or unskilful heaviness, or of too much dread of themselves or of their body, if they put themselves wholly to God's service. (i, 37, p. 65.)

But none of these temptations can touch the soul unless the sinner abandon God's help and consent to them. He should have no fear for they defile the soul 'no more than if they had heard an hound bark or had felt a flea bite' (i, 38, p. 67).

There is no need to be preoccupied with such things, however persistent the temptation may be. The more a man becomes concerned about the evils that crowd in upon him, the more they begin

to occupy his imagination. They are therefore to be treated with contempt and ignored; but in order to make certain of not falling into sloth or a consequent lack of sensitivity to evil it is advisable to seek out a wise director and abide by his decision. In this way many possible evils are avoided and the work of re-forming is allowed to continue with increasing vigour instead of with delay and confusion.<sup>3</sup> For all the time a man should be forgetting the troubles of sin and becoming more preoccupied by God himself so that the image of Jesus may appear more clearly within him.

When thou shalt rise against the ground of sin in general or else in any special sin . . . set the point of thy thought more upon God whom thou desirest than upon the sin which thou reprovest. For if thou do so, then God fighteth for thee. Thou shalt much sooner come to thy purpose if thou do so, than if thou leave thy meek desire to God principally, and will set thine heart only against the stirring of sin, as though thou wouldst destroy it by mastery of thyself. Thou shalt never so bring it about. (i, 91, p. 170.)

And Hilton goes on to show how in this manner his reader will be 'shapen again to the image of Jesus'.

In considering the first 're-formation' of the soul to the image of Jesus, the Reformation in Faith, it is very necessary to remember the concluding words of the last quotation. For although he is addressing one who has already entered the way of Christian living and definitely excludes the first conversion from his treatment (i, 71, p. 130) Hilton writes of the initial stages of the purgative way in such a way that the unwary readers might suppose that everything depended on his own personal efforts. In this there lurks the danger of Pelagianism, which sets so much store on what is to be done by man as to make him in effect the saviour of his own soul. Much labour has to be spent in seeking Jesus.

If thou cease not, but seek busily, sorrow and sigh deep, mourn stilly and stoop low, till thine eyes water for anguish and for pain because thou hast lost thy treasure Jesus, at last, when He will, thou shalt find Jesus. (i, 48, p. 93.)

The self-knowledge which has to be gained, the vices to be destroyed, the virtues to be acquired, all this has led some people almost to a standstill, so insistent do they become on their own actions. Abbot Chapman in his introduction to de Caussade's book *On Prayer* refers to eminent spiritual writers of the seventeenth century who insisted that true illumination must come to a soul that was really trying

<sup>3</sup> This short treatise on Temptation in *The Scale*, cc. 37-40 of the first book, is full of practical wisdom. It should be read in conjunction with the *Ancien Rituel* (cf LIFE OF THE SPIRIT, August, 1947, p. 55.)

and that if it did not then the man himself must be guilty—darkness is due to man's own fault.<sup>4</sup> Such is the conclusion of a too exclusive examination of self and a too tangible conception of the dark image of sin which has to be removed.

But it has to be remembered that the flower of sanctification and the whole growth of the gracious life of the spirit are rooted and grounded in faith which is an absolutely free gift from God. 'Without me you can do nothing.' So that the process is entirely the work of God, who works also even within our own efforts. The nature of man unaided could re-form nothing in himself and it was for that reason that the Word became flesh—in order to make it possible for the rest of mankind through his uniquely sanctified humanity.<sup>5</sup> The passion of Christ was necessary in order to rehabilitate man in this way through a perfect and an innocent man.

This passion of our Lord and this precious death is the ground of all the reforming of man's soul, without which might never man's soul have been reformed to the likeness of him (ii, 2, p. 180). The Word was the matrix in which all mankind was formed; the Word-made-flesh is to be again the matrix in which man is re-formed through his redemption.

It is therefore principally by faith in the Passion of Christ and by the sacraments of faith which all flow from the pierced side of Christ that this new shaping of man begins. Man is linked to the passion by faith and the sacraments; he reaches the fullness of assimilation with God only through this channel. The perfect re-formation, then, is wrought only in heaven when Jesus is all in all, and all mankind is seen in the person of Jesus (ii, 2, p. 186). But that is beyond faith, so that as long as man remains on this earth he is 'shapen' into the form of Jesus only in part. In heaven he will be 'wholly' Christ in the sense that he will be full of Christian grace, every movement of his mind and heart will be a movement of Christ's virtue, having the wisdom and the charity of the Spirit of Christ himself, that is of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. But on earth this transformation can only be partial, and being so it admits of many degrees. As soon as grace has entered his soul and his spirit has been brought into contact with the passion of Christ a man is already transformed to a certain extent. But by

<sup>4</sup> *On Prayer*. J. P. de Caussade, S.J. (Burns Oates, 1931) p. xvii.

<sup>5</sup> Hilton seems to have a curiously limited view of the dictum 'outside the Church no salvation'; for anyone who is not baptised is not only outside the grace of Christ's passion, but also everything that springs in any way from original sin becomes actual sin in him. As the pagan does not believe in the passion of Christ he cannot be saved by it. *Comp.* i, 56, p. 105, and ii, 3, p. 181.

this simple infusion of faith he may still be preoccupied with things other than God; although he has his mind set on the final goal through the cross so that he is looking in the right direction the image of sin has not been destroyed and he is more conscious of the tugging of fleshly desires than of the full life of our Lord within him. This is what Hilton calls the reformation in faith but not in feeling (ii, 5, p. 188). And it is brought about first of all by baptism in receiving which the child (or the Jew or the Saracen—ii, 6, p. 189-90) is plunged for the first time into the depths of the passion of Christ and cleansed of all sin, and in that same contact with the passion he is enclosed in Holy Church.

Through the virtue of faith of Holy Church suddenly (the child) is turned from the likeness of the fiend and made like an angel of heaven. (ii, 6, p. 190.)<sup>6</sup>

Again for the baptised Christian who has turned away from God the sacrament of Penance brings him through faith once again under the influence of the passion of Jesus.

Nevertheless it is only after this touch from the passion that the work of recovery really begins. In a trice without any feeling the soul is restored as the image of Jesus and yet it is still filled with inclinations to evil. The authority of faith still comes from outside, a law of truth which presses down on mind and will, compelling them to act for the love of God. Habits, St Thomas teaches, make the action easy and pleasant to do, as a man who has the habit of patience finds a certain joy and contentment in being patient. But when the soul is first given the gifts of our Lord's own virtues they are infused into the soul without there necessarily being an acquired habit to receive them. The man acts patiently by compelling himself to submit to annoyances and irritating circumstances. He itches to curse the fool who trod on his corn but he refrains by the virtue given him. And so he takes what the Church teaches him both as to what is and what is to be done but all as coming to him from outside the central point of self. There are two laws, as St Paul pointed out, the law of God and the law of sin; and after the first conversion the law of sin has still roots in the centre of the man's soul on account of the habits which he has formed in the past and the law of God is accepted and obeyed as coming to him from outside through the acceptance, by faith, of the Church's new

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<sup>6</sup> This raises a question which Hilton does not seem to have faced: Baptism itself makes the soul absolutely ready for heaven and yet the reformation is so far only in faith and not in feeling and the soul remains apt to sin. Compare ii, 6, with ii, 8.



authority. Sensuality remains—'By the law of the flesh I understand the sensuality which I call the image of sin' (ii, 11, p. 206)—and spirituality has to be sought in rules of Christian behaviour and in the laws of Holy Church.

But the great source of strength in these early struggles to overcome the image of sin and to discover Jesus in the soul lies in the Church herself. By faith a man abandons himself to the Church as to the living Word of God—'to whom can we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.' No longer is he guided by his own reason, making up his own mind what is true or false, right or wrong. Man has found a Mind and Will infinitely greater than his own and he has found it not up in the clouds in some mysterious vision, but in the Christ-on-earth, the Word still living in the flesh of men. Within, the mystery of iniquity still struggles for the mastery but he is now entered once more into his Mother's womb and his Mother the Church nourishes him and gives him life, bringing him forth to the new birth and helping him to become in himself another 'body of Christ'. The Church despite the stiffness and pharisaism of some of those who make up the Church, still tenderly encloses the newly-conceived child of God, reforming it into the image of Jesus.

For Holy Church that is mother of all these and hath tender love to all her children ghostly, prayeth and asketh for them all tenderly of her spouse, that is Jesus, and getteth them health of soul through virtue of her passion. (ii, 10, p. 203.)

Faith is not an energetic form of mental acrobatics, but a tender formation of the soul which before was misshapen and hard as cast metal. And the re-formation by faith is already the fashioning of a limb to Christ.



## ST AUGUSTINE, THE DOCTOR OF GRACE<sup>1</sup>

BY

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**M**ANY of our Saints have but a limited appeal, even among the ranks of the faithful; few of them indeed may be said to have a great following outside the Catholic Church. One thinks of St Vincent de Paul, St John of the Cross, more than any other perhaps St Francis of Assisi. But there is one whose position is quite unique, whose chief works belong to the great classics of human literature, whose influence on Christian

<sup>1</sup> Paper read to the Margaret Beaufort Society. Cambridge: February 5th 1950.